

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2227

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, ET, SO

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN COMMENTS ON SOMALI- ETHIOPIAN DISPUTE

REF: A. TUNIS 1887

B. TUNIS 2073

1. TUNISIAN FONOFF OFFICIAL (MOKTAR CHOUIKHA - CHIEF, AFRICAN DIVISION) GAVE US RUNDOWN ON APRIL 20 OF RECENT VISITS TO TUNIS BY OMAR ARTEH AND MANASSIE HAILE. ARTEH WAS INTERESTED FIRST OF ALL IN FOLLOWING UP ON BENGHAZI ISLAMIC CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION THAT GOT INTERCEDE WITH FRENCH ON SOMALIA'S BEHALF REGARDING TFAI. ARTEH ALSO MADE VERY STRONG PITCH FOR TUNISIAN UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF SOMALI TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN OGADEN AND TO LESSER EXTENT IN NORTHERN KENYA. ARTEH TOLD TUNISIANS THAT SOMALIA WAS INTERESTED PURSUING MATTER DURING COMING OAU SUMMIT, AND COUNTED ON SUPPORT OF MUSLIM AFRICAN STATES.

2. ETHIOPIAN FONMIN HAILE, WHO ARRIVED IN TUNIS ON APRIL 11, A WEEK AFTER ARTEH, WAS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH COUNTERING BENGHAZI RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT. HE TOOK VERY STRONG POSITION WITH BOURGUIBA AND OTHER GOT OFFICIALS THAT ERITREA WAS INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN MATTER AND THAT HAILE SELASSIE WOULD BROOK NO INTERFERENCE FROM OUTSIDE -- IN OAU OR ANYWHERE ELSE. FONMIN HAILE ALSO DEFENDED TRADITIONAL ETHIOPIAN POSITION THAT ANY TAMPERING WITH AFRICAN BORDERS -- FOR EXAMPLE IN OGADEN -- WOULD OPEN UP
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PANDORA' S BOX IN AFRICA.

3. CHOUIKHA TOLD US THAT GOT IS BASICALLY MORE SYMPATHETIC IN PRINCIPLE TO SOMALI SIDE ON BORDER DISPUTE. GOT ADMIRES ROLE THAT SOMALIA PLAYS IN INTERNATIONAL FIELD, AND FEELS CLOSE AFFINITY WITH SOMALIA BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS TIES AND TO SOME EXTENT LANGUAGE (HE NOTED THAT MANY SOMALIS SPEAK ARABIC). CHOUIKHA ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT GOT BASICALLY AGREES WITH ETHIOPIAN POSITION ON LEAVING AFRICAN BORDERS ALONE. HE THOUGHT THAT MAJORITY OF AFRICAN STATES FELT THE SAME WAY, EVEN THOUGH MANY AFRICANS HAVE LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR ETHIOPIAN REGIME (WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS FEUDAL). HE SAID HE DID NOT THINK SOMALIA WOULD GET VERY FAR WITH THIS IF IT PUSHED MATTER IN OAU.

4. CHOUIKHA ALSO SAID THAT GOT HAS ALREADY APPROACHED FRENCH REGARDING DJIBOUTI, BUT HAS IMPRESSION FRANCE HAS NO INTENTION OF WITHDRAWING. (COMMENT: WE DOUBT THAT GOT MADE MUCH MORE THAN PRO FORMA DEMARCHE TO FRENCH ON THIS ISSUE, AND ONLY TO FULFILL OBLIGATIONS IMPOSED AT BENGHAZI.) SEELYE

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